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ABSTRACT

This booklet presents child care guidelines for mothers of newly adopted children. Hints for getting acquainted with a baby and developing a close mother-child relationship are provided. Medical checkups, feedings, and physical displays of affection (touching) are emphasized. Also provided is information pertaining to special cases of adoption: if the child is a newborn, a toddler, or an older child; if the child has been in an institution or foster care; if the child is handicapped; and if the child is of another race. (CM)

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Helping Love Grow

Some Hints for Mothering Your Adopted Baby

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By Norma Jane Bumgarner

Helping Love Grow

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Revised 1974

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To Myles

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My husband and I are being both gratified and challenged by the day-to-day process of bringing our adopted son into the circle of love that binds the people in our house into a family. Our experience with him and the two children who were born to us, however, has not been enough to give me all the ideas included in this booklet. I am grateful, therefore, to the many people who read my original typescripts and have added so much from their knowledge and experience.

I would especially like to thank Elizabeth Hormann and Judi Hayes, who have patiently read and re-read each draft for me and have helped me so much in making the words say what I want them to say. Sue McCarley added many thoughts from her experience in counselling adoptive parents. I am grateful to Veronica Al-Janabi and her colleagues at Sunbeam Family Service in Oklahoma City for their patience in listening to my jumbled thoughts as this booklet was taking shape in my mind and for their thoughtful additions to the final draft. Dr. David Smith, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia, kindly provided his comments and criticism, including important medical tests needed by a baby. Thanks, too, go to Nancy Reynolds for the thoughts of another adoptive mother besides myself. To my family, who will be glad to see me put my typewriter away, thank you; and you can count on a very special dinner tomorrow night.

Gratitude for help with the second edition goes to Niles Ann Newton, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University. Her thoughts were, as always, very helpful to me. I want to say a special thank you to Esther Greiner, R.N., and Gail Dunsky, both from the staff of the Oklahoma Cerebral Palsy Center, for sharing their time so generously and providing insight into the needs of a child growing up with a handicap, and into the needs of his parents.

HELPING LOVE GROW

Some Hints for Mothering Your Adopted Baby

Your adopted baby isn't different from any other baby, but the start he has in your family is. Some special attention to principles of good mothering will help him — and you — to develop the wonderful feeling that he has found his home at last.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Get a checkup. As soon as you bring your baby home, you should make an appointment to have him examined by your pediatrician or family doctor. You will have more confidence after your own doctor examines him thoroughly and gives you personal reassurance of his good health. Besides what he can tell from his examination, the doctor will be interested in the health of your baby's first mother during her pregnancy, the length and difficulty of her labor, and what medication she may have needed during her pregnancy and delivery. He will appreciate any information you can get concerning illnesses or allergies in the family history of your baby's biological parents. Because your baby may not have been checked for anemia, it is a wise precaution to ask your doctor to do a hemoglobin test to see whether he might be one of the few who needs extra iron in his diet. If your baby is a newborn, you might also make certain that he has had a serology, urinalysis, and has been checked for PKU. If he is six weeks or older, he should have a tuberculin test.

Everyone will feel upset about the child sometimes. Every child, adopted or not, comes into his family a stranger, so that it can take a day, or a week, or even longer before real love develops among the family members. There are times when every parent is unhappy or worried about the child, whether he is adopted or not. Some things about the way a child looks or acts will worry you. Although adoptive parents naturally tend to be a bit more concerned about their babies' health and appearance right at first, parents whose children are "home-made" do have the same kind of feelings as they are getting to know their children. Your loving care for your baby and his warm responses form a bond between you that will overcome your initial doubts.

Love starts out as a one-to-one thing. In his earliest years the central person in a baby's life is his mother. Since your adopted baby will be a bit confused at first about who his mother is, it is a good idea that you be the one to care for him most of the time. Some adoptive parents, for instance, feel that

you would be wise to make a rule that mother be the one to feed him for the first few months. Only when he has learned to know and trust you can he expand his world to include the other special people around him.

It is best if you leave him in the care of other people as little as possible. Of course you shouldn't give up all your outside interests, but your baby will probably be welcome most of the places you like to go. Some mothers find back carriers very helpful for outings, since the baby usually sleeps contentedly when he is snuggled close to his mother in the carrier. Travel with baby will also be easy with disposable diapers and premixed formulas. Although there will doubtless be some things you will have to put off until he is older, with ingenuity you will be able to satisfy most of your need for outings while still meeting your baby's urgent need to be close to you.

DEVELOPING THE MOTHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Touch is the language of love. Touch is a special kind of loving that parents give their children, a kind of loving that institutions cannot give. Babies in hospitals or orphanages who do not get the special handling that mothers give sometimes fail to develop normally or even die. Loving is as vital to babies as food.

A baby or young child needs to be rocked and cuddled. It makes him happy and actually helps him to grow and learn. A mother also needs this contact with her baby in order fully to develop and enjoy her feelings as a mother. A comfortable rocking chair is a very good investment for any family.

Other ways to "get in touch" with your baby can include rubbing his back or tummy, carrying him on your back or chest in a baby carrier, taking him into your bed with you at night or naptime, or letting him enjoy a warm bath with you. These things are often very helpful when your baby is fussy or colicky.

Feeding times are very important. Feeding is one way we all show love, and babies learn much about loving when they are being fed. You should be sure the milk is carefully warmed and cradle the baby in your arms (not in an infant seat) so that he can feel your body as you feed him. In fact, some mothers

breastfeed their adopted babies. Your baby gets so much more from his mealtimes than food that he certainly should not be left to feed with a propped-up bottle. Nor should he be encouraged to hold his own bottle any sooner than he insists upon doing it himself.

Since the milk your family drinks is not perfectly suited to a young baby's needs, be sure to consult your pediatrician about the special infant formula that is best for your baby. As you add other foods to his diet, remember that feeding is part of loving. If the spoon or certain foods make your baby unhappy, there is no reason not to wait until he is older to feed him. Most of today's infant formulas alone are sufficient for his needs until he is at least three or four months old.

Discipline can wait until your baby is older. This is not because he is adopted, but holds true for babies in general. In the first year or two babies are helpless and need comforting whenever they are upset. In these early years you should be teaching your baby that the world is a good place in which he need not be hungry, lonely, cold, or afraid. Don't let people worry you that you are spoiling your baby. You can't. It will be a long while before he can understand well enough to behave selfishly. Nor need you be concerned about giving "bad habits" to a baby. He will want to grow up and not be a baby any more, just as much as you did when you were little. He will give up his baby habits all by himself if he is not forced to give them up before he is ready.

Crawling babies and toddlers, for example, adopted or not, are very inquisitive and cannot control their need to reach for and explore everything, no matter how dangerous or fragile or dirty. Part of the care of the "under-threes" is moving as many such objects out of reach as possible, and keeping constant watch to remove **the child** from those objects which cannot be removed from him.

Also, researchers into child development and experienced parents are finding that most babies, some starting at only a few weeks of age, but more commonly toward the end of the first year, become very attached to one or two of the people who care for them most. This feeling of attachment will probably cause your child to be very upset whenever he is separated from you. He may not even want you to leave the room! This "clingy" behavior is a healthy and vital part of a child's growing up and learning to love and trust people.

The quickest and easiest way through a child's time of intense attachment ("clinginess" or being "mommyish") seems to be to concentrate on meeting his need for you by keeping

him with you as much as possible. Enforced separation usually upsets the child and makes him **more** clingy for a while. Generally children seem to be the most upset at separation from parents before the age of two, after which their ability to understand and accept gradually increasing separations begins to develop.

Your child, of course, will develop at his own rate. He may bounce off happily to a baby sitter or to Grandma before he is two, or he may still be hiding behind your legs whenever he sees anybody outside the immediate family when he is near four. Given time and loving care, though, children do come to trust the world outside their own families and develop the independence which we value so much in our growing children.

When your child is older and feels very secure in your love, you will find it much easier to help him toward independence and to teach him the rules by which he must live in your family. Then he, like all children, needs your loving guidance and the appropriate discipline, geared to his abilities at every age. Such books as **The Child Under Six** by James L. Hymes, Jr., and **The Magic Years** by Selma Fraiberg, can help you understand what to expect of your child at each stage of development.

A word to fathers: You may be one of the fathers who enjoy sharing in the care of a new baby from the first. The whole family can benefit from your involvement. On the other hand, you may be one of the many new fathers who feels rather left out when the baby seems to take over your wife's time and attention. If you should be among these fathers, it will help to remember that a baby is so totally dependent on his mother

for only a very short time. Soon he will smile at you or crawl into your arms, and your wonderful relationship with your baby will be underway.

Of course, what has been said already about the importance of mother's holding and cuddling the baby holds true for fathers too. If you feel awkward, though, with a tiny baby and maybe a bit concerned that he is not as responsive to you as he is to your wife, do not worry. Many men (though not all) have this experience. You don't need to press your relationship with him any faster than it develops comfortably. Even if he is a "mommy's baby" for a few weeks or months, just as soon as he grows old enough to realize that he has two parents, you will have your hands — and lap — full much of the time.

In the meantime you can help the baby by doing what you can to make the transition to parenthood easier. A young baby needs many hours of your wife's day, so for now you should encourage her to let the non-essential housework go and help out wherever you can. Let her know the few things around the house that really matter to you so that she can use her limited energy only for essential tasks. You can also be helpful by discouraging too much company from coming and by changing the subject at those times when everyone seems to be offering conflicting advice on how to care for your baby.

In the first year or two you are helping your baby to lay the foundation for his entire personality. Your patience and love during this critical time will pay off, not only in a happier baby, but in a happier family for you all as time goes on.

SPECIAL CASES

If your baby is a newborn, it will be fairly easy to help him adjust to his new home. Do consider, though, that he has probably been in a hospital nursery where no one had time to hold him enough. Already he may have learned not to cry much, even when he feels lonely. So plan on "mothering him up" for a week or so until he learns who mother is and that you do have time to take care of his needs.

If your baby has been in an institution or foster care, you will need to make a special effort to teach him that you are his mother now and that you will always care for him.

If he has been where there was little time to give him much individual attention, he may be very placid and rarely cry. This does not mean that he is a "good baby," but that he has given up on ever finding the mothering he needs. It is very important that you give this baby a lot of extra handling, even though he

may not cry for it. You should try to hold him every minute that you can for as many days as it takes for him to know and trust your love. A baby carrier for your back or chest can be a real boon in caring for a baby who needs so much extra closeness to you. After a few days (or even longer sometimes) do not be surprised if he changes from a quiet, passive baby into an extremely fussy and clinging one. He needs to make up for all the closeness he has missed. With time and much extra mothering from you he will relax and begin to behave normally.

A baby who has had the care of a devoted foster mother from birth will probably be very restless and lonely the first few days. No matter how young he is, he will benefit from your patience and understanding. Hold him close if he will let you and gently tell him that you know he misses his foster mother, but that you are the one to love him and take care of him now. Though he won't understand the words, he will be comforted by your sympathetic voice and kind handling. Soon he will finish his period of mourning and learn to love and trust you as his mother.

What if you adopt a toddler or an older child? Your young child is likely to be quite a challenge to your talents as a parent. You will need to have special patience and understanding, both of your own feelings and of your child's, if you adopt a young child who may have become very attached to a foster mother. The rewards can be as great as the challenge, though, especially when you see a frightened, insecure little one blossom into a confident member of your family.

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Prepare yourself well for understanding his behavior. The books listed at the end of this booklet are excellent and will help you distinguish between normal behavior and things that need special attention.

It is as vital for you to "get in touch" with your older child as it is with a baby, though you will have to be much more tactful about it at first. Neither you nor your child can be expected to feel a deep love for each other immediately. You need to live and play and even cry and get angry together sometimes for a true family love to grow.

Anything you can do that will make physical contact between you and your child more comfortable will be helpful. Since you are new to him, though, you should approach him gradually, increasing the amount of touching you do as his ability to accept it increases. Rocking him, of course, is a great way to get close to him as soon as he will let you. It is a good idea, also, for you to bathe him carefully every day, whether he is dirty or not. Perhaps you might try putting milk or juice into a bottle and feeding him like a baby. Though it may feel awkward at first, stroking his cheek, patting his head, and giving him a friendly hug soon will be natural expressions of love. It may help to take him into your bed sometimes at night. When he has been with you a long time and is used to you, your toddler might enjoy a bath or shower with you now and then.

Keep in mind with your small child that he has been living somewhere else and that he has memories of people and things before you knew him. The time before he joins your family is part of his life, and you can help him not to "lose" his early years by talking about his memories with him sometimes if he wants to. When he comes into your home, try to make arrangements for him to bring some things along, including, perhaps, pictures of his foster family. If he is attached to something, such as a blanket or doll or pacifier, you should help him to keep from mislaying it, because his special object can mean a lot to him during the transition period.

As you are getting acquainted he may put on his best behavior for a while. After a time, however, he may feel that he has to test your love for him. If he chooses to test you by returning to baby behavior, it is usually best to go along with him. If, on the other hand, he is doing things which no one is ever allowed to do, such as throwing or breaking things, he needs you to stop him and to help him to do something else. In either case, you should make use of any warm, cuddly time that arises (some other time — not the bad time) to reassure him that you are his parents now — for keeps — no matter what — even if he misbehaves. It won't be long before he feels sure of your love and will be less of a handful.

It is especially important not to be in a hurry for your little one to grow up and be independent. He did not spend his first year or two in your home and does not know that it is safe to act like a baby around you if he needs to. It is much better to postpone any pressure about such things as potty training or weaning from his bottle until he is quite secure in his new home. Holding on to infant habits for a few more months or years will do no harm, and might actually help him. He will be much more independent in the long run if you baby him through this rather frightening time in his life.

A handicapped child, of course, requires special care. Be sure to consult experts who can tell you how to help him develop to the best that his abilities allow. There are many ways to get information about resources for children with special needs in your community, and it would be a good idea to check with several sources to make sure that you don't overlook a help that might prove valuable to you and your child.

Your adoption caseworker, family physician, and minister probably know most of the agencies in your area that serve the needs of handicapped children. Other sources of information are your Public Welfare Office or Department of Public Health, private or church-sponsored social and family service agencies, Department of Mental Health, Chamber of Commerce, and the nearest Medical School. Your State Department of Education and your local Board of Education can tell you about special education programs in your school system.

Your Public Library or the Library of the nearest University or Medical School should have **The Directory for Exceptional Children,** A Listing of Educational and Training Facilities (Porter Sargent Publisher, 11 Beacon St., Boston, Mass. 02108). This book lists resources for handicapped children throughout the United States and Canada. Your Department of Public Welfare will probably have the American Public Welfare Association's **Directory of Social Services.**

Like any other parent you may find that things about your child bother you occasionally, sometimes even the handicap itself. It is best not to try to deny your child's handicap, either to yourself or to him. Instead you should try to see the handicap for what it is — no more, no less. He needs the same kind of sympathetic understanding that every person does for his tragedies, in this case for the sadness of having a part or parts of his body not working as they should. At the same time, he needs the ability to avoid taking himself too seriously, but rather to enjoy himself as he is and to laugh at himself. Don't be afraid to cry with him over what he can't do; that's part of accepting him as he is. At the same time, don't be afraid to enjoy and to laugh with him at his disabilities.

Though he may need special care, even institutional training or care at times, you should give him opportunity for every bit of independence and self-esteem he can manage. To be as much help as you can to your child you need to get as realistic a picture as possible of whether and how your child's disability will affect him as an adult. This is one of the things you should discuss with people involved in the care and training of people who have the problem(s) your child has.

You need to know how it will affect his appearance, his behavior, what he will be able and unable to do. That way you can give him as much guidance as he will accept throughout his childhood into areas of interest and activity which will be best suited to his abilities as an adult. You should also find out how much extra time and physical care he will need from you and for how long so that you can know better how to pace yourself and your energies for the additional parenting that may be ahead.

As a strong parent-child bond develops between you and your little one, it will come naturally to love him and praise him honestly for what he does best.

When you adopt a child of another race, you face a lot of unknowns, because people have relatively little experience so far with trans-racial adoptions. No one knows what happens to a child's "racial identity" when he grows up among people of a different color. Psychologists, Social Workers, nor Parents have been able to determine exactly what kind of efforts, if any, parents of a different race should put forth to acquaint their child with the culture and traditions he would have known had he grown up among people of his own race. There is much discussion of how parents of one race teach racial pride to a child of another race, and how to deal with racial identity in children from mixed backgrounds. Some, on the other hand, suggest that racial identity is not really a very important concern when compared with your child's much more basic need for "human identity" and family love.

David C. Anderson's **Children of Special Value,** which gives a father's views on interracial families, his own and others, is very helpful reading for parents who have or are considering forming an interracial family through adoption. Pearl Buck's article about her Black daughters (see Booklist) is enlightening in that she wrote it after her children had grown up.

To be a good parent to a child of another race, it is probably unnecessary to demand of yourself that you have no traces of racial prejudice. Some racism has been part of the growing-up experience for all of us, but it need not stand in the way of your loving your baby. Remember that even biological parents frequently question their love for the baby right at first. It seems reasonable that your baby's racial characteristics would be as likely as anything else to worry you during the getting acquainted period.

As your love grows, however, you want to learn to love him exactly as he is. You want to love him **because** of his different face, hair, eyes, etc., not in spite of them. Chances are that you will be surprised to find as time goes on that you especially love the very characteristics that bothered you in the early weeks. As he grows up, be sure to praise the things about him that are attractive to you, including things that are different from you. That way you can help him to be as proud of his appearance as you are.

You will be faced with the fact that he is adopted more often than other adoptive parents because of his physical differences from you. You should think about how to maintain a balance between how pleased you are with him and the fact that people's too-frequent questions can tend to make you or your child over-emphasize his adoption to the exclusion of other interesting things about him.

For information or for contact with other people interested in interracial adoption, write The Open Door Society, Inc., 5 Weredale Park, Montreal 215, Quebec; The National Council of Adoptive Parents Organizations, Box 543, Teaneck, N.J. 07666; and The Adoption Resource Exchange of North America, 44 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010.

SUMMING IT UP

Since you have chosen to adopt your baby, there is no doubt that you want him very much and have been looking forward to his arrival. When he comes, enjoy him. Listen to your grandmother or great-grandmother when she says, "Spoil him. That's what babies are for." When you have longed for a baby as adoptive parents have, it is a shame to get caught in the fruitless race for the first baby who sleeps all night, who eats the most baby food at the earliest age, or who is weaned the youngest. As you begin to realize how short his babyhood is, you will be in less of a hurry to rush him from one stage in his development to another. Every day in your life together is precious, so treasure each one as it comes. Relaxed, happy times are good for both of you.

Everyone has problems to face as he comes to know himself and grows into an adult, and all parents must provide guidance as their children are dealing with these problems. Your adopted child has the one additional challenge of understanding and accepting his adoption. It is impossible for anyone to say just how much of a challenge this will be for your child, but it is certain that some time spent learning about child development will prove invaluable to you later when you must try to distinguish between the problems all children meet and those that may arise solely as a result of adoption .

The special mothering and fathering you give your child while he is very small are vital in establishing a strong parent-child love. More important than exactly when or how you tell him about his adoption is the closeness and love that you develop between yourself and your child. When you have formed the intimate bond that exists only between parent and child, there is no **one** thing that you can do "wrong" that will harm him.

The warm feelings you develop toward him and your decision to adopt him will make it much easier for him to feel good about himself and his adoption. A well-mothered and fathered child is better able to come to you for help later as he is trying to deal with his problems, just as he did with any difficulties he faced as a baby. When you make good investments in love early, that love is there to draw upon any time in the future that you need it.

BOOKS AND OTHER HELPS

Adoption:

Florence Rondell ,Ruth Michaels: **The Adopted Family.** 1965 (Crown Publishers, Inc., 419 Park Ave. South, N.Y. N.Y. 10016).

H. David Kirk: **Shared Fate.** 1964 (The Free Press, Division of the MacMillan Co., 60 5th Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10011).

Eda LeShan: "You and Your Adopted Child (Public Affairs Pamphlet #274, 381 Park Ave. South, N.Y., N.Y. 10016).

Interracial Adoption:

David C. Anderson: **Children of Special Value.** 1972 (St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10010).

Pearl Buck: "I am the Better Woman for Having My Two Black Children," **Today's Health,** January 1972.

Child Development:

James L. Hymes, Jr.: **The Child Under Six.**

Lee Salk, Rita Kramer: **How to Raise a Human Being.**

Selma Fraiberg: **The Magic Years.**

(These books may be obtained from the ICEA Supplies Center, 1414 NW 85th St., Seattle, Washington 98117.)

Child Care and Development:

Niles Ann Newton: **The Family Book of Child Care.** 1957 (available from La Leche League, Int., 9616 Minneapolis Ave., Franklin Park, Ill. 60131.)

Eda LeShan: **The Conspiracy Against Childhood.** 1967 (Atheneum Publishers, 122 E. 42nd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10017).

Nursing an Adopted Baby:

Elizabeth Hormann: **Relactation: A Guide to Breastfeeding the Adopted Baby.** (available from Le Leche League, Int., 9616 Minneapolis Ave., Franklin Park, Ill. 60131).

Jimmie Lynne Avery: **Induced Lactation: A Guide for Counselling and Management.** (P. O. Box 6459, Denver, Colo. 80206)

Lact-Aid: a patented nursing supplementer for use by adoptive mothers. (available from J. J. Avery, Inc., P. O. Box 6459, Denver Colo. 80206).

Baby Carriers:

Happy Baby Carrier, 932 Calle Miramar, Redondo Beach, Cal. 90277.

Pattern for sewing a baby carrier: Carrier Pattern, 1712 Lenox Dr., Norman, Okla. 73069.

Snuggli, Evergreen, Colo. 80439.